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In search of a conceptualisation of the term 'community' in metropolitan Perth

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In Search of a Conceptualisation of the term 'Community' in Metropolitan Perth.

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Thesis For Admission To The Degree Of:

Master of Psychology

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Running Head:

Conceptions of Community

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Abstract

Communities are dynamic, historically determined, and complex, and the topic itself has concerned social scientists for some time (Durkheim, 1964, Weisenfeld, 1996). However, there has been an intrinsic problem in previous research arising from the ambiguity of the concept of the term 'community' itself, specifically the contradictions concerning its essential meaning. The aim of this study was to determine whether there are other ways of thinking about community without taking on any unwanted connotations of previous conceptualisations from past research. The research was based on the social constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology was employed. Conceptualisations of the term community were surveyed among 16 participants using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Results were analysed using analytic induction methodology. Participants identified seven interrelated concepts: geographic attachment to place, communality, social interaction, active involvement and participation, family, sense of belonging, and transience. From this research, understanding of the term 'community' has been shown to have far reaching implications, which involve influencing the assumptions underlying community development initiatives and programs promoting social change. Furthermore, a socio-psychological understanding of community can help to facilitate the intentional creation of community when and where it is needed.

Declaration

I, Andria W. Green, certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

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Introduction

While the idea of community has been studied at length in the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Puddifoot, 1996), community studies in Australia are relatively recent in comparison (Bishop, Sonn, Drew & Contos, 2000). There are major differences between the Australian context and that of the United States of America and the United Kingdom. For example, Australia has a different socio-political history to both these countries (Archer, 1997; Rappaport, 1977). Furthermore, geographic size, population demographics, urbanisation, and distances between major towns and cities are also major differences between all three countries (Jupp, 1997). One of the implications of these differences is their unique influence on how Australians, particularly people living in the Perth metropolitan area, view and understand the notion of community.

There is a need to seek another way of thinking about community without incorporating any unwanted connotations of previous conceptualisations, since previous research within the area has tended to obscure rather than clarify this concept of 'community' (Puddifoot, 1995). Previous research has indicated that there is an intrinsic problem concerning the difficulty of the concept of 'community'. That is, there are contradictions concerning its essential meaning (Puddifoot, 1995). Many definitions of the term 'community' have been offered during the past 100 years. Over 40 years ago, Hillary (1955) noted 94 different definitions of community that had been cited within the research literature. However, as Puddifoot (1995) noted, the 'catch-all' nature of these definitions inevitably lead to a dilution of the essential nature of the phenomenon.

The differences between the present study and previous work are the country of residence of the participants, as well as the theoretical background and method of data collection and analysis. Presently the definitional status of the term 'community' remains unresolved. Thus, the aim of this study is to provide an explorative and descriptive account of people's conceptualisations underlying their understandings of the term community. The objective guiding the current research is to broaden the current information base regarding the use of the term 'community'

Chapter 1: Community: Theories and Definitions

Research on the term 'community' provides a valuable contribution to the theoretical nature of the area. For example, Wiesenfeld (1996) has referred to community as a fundamental context for human activity. Although the term has been constantly in use, it remains confusing, difficult to understand and to define. 'Community' has been used as both a cliché and a rallying cry; an analytic concept and a socio-psychological sample; a geographic location; and an emotional state (Scherer, 1972). The tendency has been to use 'community' as an abbreviated term which may refer to social groups, institutions and relationships (Elias, 1974), resulting in some uncertainty about what is meant by phrases such as 'the world community', 'the academic community', the 'Aboriginal community', and 'the church community'. The host of definitions provided throughout history often add to the confusion rather than clarify it, since they differ in terms of the purposes they attribute to the field of the specific research, their theoretical background, the context in which they have been generated, and methodological strategies for their measurement (Wiesenfeld, 1996).

Early Theories of Community

Historically, many theorists have used alternative terminology rather than the term 'community' and referred to locality or village/town/suburb/city for the geographical aspect and to social systems for the organisation of social relations. Many theorists have used it in an intentionally vague way, while others have specified its meaning to suit their particular needs (Wild, 1981). Theories of community can be traced back to Henry Maine (1861), Emile Durkheim (1964) and Ferdinand Tonnies (1957). For these theorists, the coming of a new rational society meant the destruction of a stable

environment and traditional patterns of authority. Maine referred to community as a movement from the laws of status to the laws of contract; whereas Durkheim viewed community as moving from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity; and Tonnies formulated a model of the evolution of social action, moving from the level of *gemeinschaft* (community) to *gesellschaft* (society).

Maine (1861, cited in Wild, 1981) proposed that society evolved from an ancient condition in which the family was dominant to a modern situation where the individual predominated. Using the legal system as an index of change he called laws governing family norms *status* laws and those governing relations between individuals *contracts*. Maine argued that in traditional communities, people's relationships were determined by status within the family, whereas in modern societies they were determined by individually agreed contracts.

In contrast to the above, Durkheim's (1964) interest was to understand the conditions that produced social solidarity or what he referred to as a "settled community" in society. He was concerned about the growth of anomie (normlessness) in modern societies, which he saw as destroying solidarity. He argued that in traditional societies with a simple division of labour and technology, a small population sharing a sense of belonging and with norms based on repressive laws, which both punished offenders and reinforced traditional morality, there was *mechanical solidarity*. For Durkheim, modern society was characterised by a considerably larger population, and therefore a greater density of relationships amongst its members, an increase in reciprocal demands centred on mutually agreed contracts and a more specified division of labour. He characterised the modern order by the term *organic solidarity* in an attempt to indicate the intricate nature of interdependence within it.

Alternatively, Tonnies (1957) classified his evolutionary model of community in terms of social action. He maintained that humans acted either naturally in community or rationally in society. Tonnies viewed the term community as centred on blood/kinship, land/neighbourhood and mind/friendship. He argued that together, these attributes constituted the home of all virtue and morality, which would gradually give rise to common sentiments that involve close and enduring loyalties to the place and people. Gesellschaft or societal relationships were largely the opposite of those attributed to community or gemeinschaft. Tonnies referred to gesellschaft as a social life which was cold, impersonal and fragmented. He maintained that any associations among individual and organisations within a society (gesellschaft) lacked cohesion, leading to a frequent occurrence of friction and strife, and that human beings were relatively isolated. By contrast, life in communities (gemeinschaft) was warmer, more homely and affectionate. He believed that solidarity and harmony, unity of purpose and cooperation were ensured by a firm tradition. In essence, Tonnies believed that people were bound together by one thing only: namely reciprocal needs.

In summary, the above theorists described 'community' as a stable entity, which is being eroded and destroyed due to the developing infrastructure of society from traditional communities. While these theories have provided the basis for community-centred research, the problem inherent in all these early theories and models is the community-society dichotomy. It has been argued that this dichotomy gave rise to past and current definitional disputes over the concept of community (Wild, 1981).

'Community' initially represented an idealistic notion, and its definitional meaning resulted in a concept that constituted what each individual theorist thought was the good life. In an attempt to overcome this difficulty, some theorists applied more stringent criteria in their attempts at defining community. However, they have been unable to

come to terms with the changing nature and conceptualisations of community because of the limitations inherent in the dichotomous model upon which their definitions are based.

Early Definitions of Community

Definitions of the term 'community' have a long history. 'Community' has been applied to a range of territorial and social phenomena. For example, it can refer to a geographically isolated small town or village, a dispersed ethnic group, an institution such as a prison, those sharing common residences or occupations and to those who feel a sense of belonging together (Elias, 1974; Wild, 1981).

The differences between definitions were illustrated by Hillery (1955), who attempted to achieve some coordination of the diverse nature of community. He compared 94 different definitions of community, and abstracted 16 attributes from these definitions which included territory, a sense of belonging, social interaction and common norms. He then isolated 22 combinations of the 16 attributes. For example, some definitions stressed geographic locality, others referred to locality and kinship, and others stressed locality, kinship and common norms. Hillery concluded that 70 out of the 94 definitions included territory, social interaction and common ties as important elements of community. All the definitions had only one factor in common: namely, people.

Most of the definitions Hillery (1955) examined combined two or more variables, producing a combined view of community such as "a collectivity of people who occupy a geographical area, who are engaged together in economic and political activities, who essentially constitute a self governing social unit with some common values, and who experience feelings of belonging to one another" (cited in Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 29). This definition is representative of what many theorists consider the 'ideal' community

(Elias, 1974; Poplin, 1972; Wild, 1981). The result has been a confusion between the empirical description of what community is and its normative prescription as suggested by academics (Bell & Newby, 1974). It can be argued that ideal types of community provide a way of talking and thinking about actual events, processes and experiences in a general and comparative manner. However, the major problem is that theorists represent what they feel communities should be rather than what they actually are.

Another problem associated with these definitions involved the danger of defining communities based simply on place. The link between community and geography is not straightforward, as people themselves are complex and the social forces that act upon them inevitably cause variability and change (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Scherer, 1972). This concept was advanced by Martindale (1964), who defined community as "a collectivity which forms a total system of social life capable of bringing its members through the ordinary problems of a single year or a single life" (p. 69). He removed geography from the concept of community and equated it with a social system incorporating a total way of life. However, he did point out that social life has to take place somewhere, and without some type of territorial reference it is difficult to distinguish social interaction within a family, a commune, a village or a city.

Warren (1963), on the other hand, attempted to retain geography in the concept of community. He defined community as "that combination of social units and systems which perform the major social functions having locality relevance ... we mean the organisation of social activities to afford people daily local access to those broad areas of activity which are necessary in day-to-day living" (p. 9). Warren isolated production/distribution/consumption, socialisation, social control, social participation and mutual support as the social functions having locality relevance. He believed that the locality relevance of such functions had declined since multinational corporations

and nation states had taken over the control of production, the mass media had affected socialisation and social control had been passed from the family to the peer group.

Furthermore, control from commercial constraints were now under societal agencies, social participation had suffered from privatisation, and mutual support had been replaced by state support. While simplistic, this summary highlights the confusion created by the community-society dichotomy.

The distinction between horizontal community (local dimension) and vertical community (national dimension) was also made by Warren (1963). For Warren, a community's horizontal pattern is "the structural and functional relation of its various social units and sub-systems to each other" (p.162); whereas its vertical pattern represents "the structural and functional relation of its various social units and sub-systems to extra-community systems" (p. 151). He argued that the United States of America had been experiencing great change involving the increasing orientation of local community units towards national-level systems. In his view, the vertical had superseded the horizontal and in the process reoriented the American community toward 'extra-community' systems. Warren based his arguments on changes, particularly increasing complexity, occurring in seven areas: the division of labour, differentiation of interests and associations, increasing systematic relationships to a larger society, bureaucratisation and impersonalisation, transfer of functions to profit enterprise and government, urbanisation and suburbanisation and changing values. Warren then identified the impact of these on his four dimensions of community: local autonomy, coincidence of service areas, psychological identification with locality, and the strength of the horizontal pattern. Again, the problem with Warren's arguments is that he has failed to come to terms with the changing nature of community because of the limitations inherent in the community-society dichotomous model.

A more universal view of community was proposed by Minar and Greer (1968), which may be regarded as similar to Weber's (1968) view of community. Minar and Greer's definition of community, which was more closely allied to socio-psychological theory, suggested that community was based on the subjective feeling of the individuals and organisations that comprise the community - that they belonged together. They recorded the essence of community as belonging together which implied that the members of a community share a common set of interests, values and attitudes, and these may define the boundaries of social interaction.

In comparison, Weber's (1968) view was based on the premise that the source of community formation, communal relationships and sentiments of belonging was competition for economic, political and social interests. Community interests (economic, political and social) were seen to underpin communal solidarity which was thought to be intrinsic to this shared orientation. Minar and Greer (1968) referred to the term community as a more moral or spiritual phenomenon. While territory was not a defining attribute of community in these models, Minar and Greer caused a lot of confusion with their references to factories, trade unions, corporations and professions as communities. At times they made reference to prison communities, military communities and other social phenomena. Minar and Greer commented that these multiple usages of the term community were unavoidable. However, this made it difficult for those who sought to study community as a distinct form of social and territorial organisation.

In an effort to resolve some of the confusion, Gusfield (1975) identified three dimensions to community. First, community describes a specific form of human association, that is the feelings of the actors that they belong together. Second, it is part of a theory of change through social evolution. Third, it forms a segment of ideological

debate over the value of the present compared to the past and to possible alternative futures. Gusfield emphasised community as a relational concept rather than a territorial one, the former being defined as “the existence or absence of bonds of similarity and sympathy”, the latter as a “particular physical location and territorial boundaries” (p. 33). He stressed that community was an important component of modern life, since it placed limitations and regulations on individual behaviour through the process of conforming to the rules governing the groups to which they belong. Furthermore, Gusfield (1975) argued that the processes supposed to weaken communal systems in favour of societal systems may be just as likely to strengthen communal systems. His linear evolutionary theory from community to society has been criticised as being too simplistic (Wild, 1981). Gusfield maintained that, rather than a movement from community to society as a result of social change, he would prefer community and society to be regarded as points of reference. Consequently, he commented that individuals can align themselves with one community rather than another, or they can focus their attention on the associational or societal interests binding them to specific communities. For example, a Jewish individual residing in a suburb may align himself or herself with the city Jewish community rather than the suburb in which he or she resides.

A criticism of Gusfield’s (1975) work is that it remains within the confines of the dichotomous model of community. He has explained the theory’s history, analysed its shortcomings, and indicated the complexity of his theory by stressing those events, processes and relationships that bring community and society together in the same situation. However, his analysis of these situations remained static since he removed the process of social change (Wild, 1981). Even taking this into consideration, Puddifoot (1995) points out that Gusfield (1975) added two significant conceptions to

the area of community: his emphasis of community as a relational concept rather than a territorial one, and his view that community should be treated as an analytic or empirical concept. These advances formed the basis for more recent theories and definitions of the term 'community'.

Current Theories and Definitions

Studies of local communities went into a period of decline in the 1960s and 1970s, when local communities seemed to have diminished power and influence as societies became increasingly complex (Nisbet, 1973). Nisbet believed that basic cultural values were instilled and transmitted only through direct face-to-face relationships, and Wellman (1979, cited in Unger & Wandersman, 1985) noted that as technology, communication, transportation and lifestyles advanced, neighbourhoods were losing some of their importance. According to Day and Murdoch (1993), in the early 1980s community was not considered a useful explanatory concept. It had been disregarded by academic social researchers due to its identification with the sociological/anthropological theory of functionalism, which implied an inability to accommodate social conflict and change.

By the mid 1980s the concept of community had become fixed as a rather idealistic, utopian and backward looking notion, seemingly at odds with the actual and perceived increasing mobility of populations, individualism and the growth of multicultural society (Day & Murdoch, 1993). In addition, many of the relationships and activities that people engaged in were seen to take place outside of their neighbourhoods. Consequently, Bulmer (1985) advocated a more concrete notion of community, moving away from metaphysical notions of community in the direction of primary groups, friends, neighbours and family. Relatives, friends, work settings and associations were often located outside the neighbourhood, with the consequence that community was

viewed in terms of geographic and relational conceptions rather than in the context of the community-society dichotomy model.

This reevaluation of the traditional views of community was summarised in Heller's (1989) presidential address of the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. In his discussion of community building, Heller recognised the two main ways that the term community had been used in the past: as a locality and as a relational community. To these two attributes he added community as a collective political power. This distinction was made because he believed that "organising for social action is one of the few ways left for ordinary citizens in complex technological democracies to develop social structures that were responsive to their needs" (p. 4). Heller believed that the power of organised constituencies was a tool to campaign for social change, regardless of whether it came from localities or organised interest groups. Furthermore, he argued for a return to the conception of community as the recognition that group attachments are at the core of the development of self-identity and self-efficacy. He proposed the notion that the study of community and group processes have an important place in psychological study because these processes impacted upon personal and social development. Accordingly, Heller argued that the conceptions of community that would be developed in the future needed to recognise its multifaceted nature and move beyond locality-based models of village and neighbourhood to include an increased diversity of groups.

Following Heller's (1989) discussion of community, Wiesenfeld (1996) examined the concepts of community found in the literature on community psychology. Her results suggested that the definitions of the concepts of community differed in terms of "the purposes they attribute to the field, their theoretical grounding, the context within which they have been generated, and the methodological strategies for their

measurement” (p. 337). She also noted that previous definitions of the term community made general reference to a community’s component elements (individuals and the physical contexts which define their activities) and to the processes (psychological, social and cultural) that occur among these components. Each definition of community, according to Wiesenfeld, stressed similarity among the members of a community as a necessary condition for group identity to develop. However, these definitions ignored the unique characteristics of each individual and the potential subcultural and intragroup differences which are present in every group. Therefore, Wiesenfeld argued for a reinterpretation of community.

Weisenfeld (1996) forwarded the notion of community as an entity that is constructed. She described community as the individual characteristics of a group of people who share a set of common features, such as the specific environment in which they live, work, enjoy themselves and help each other, and the needs they face. Wiesenfeld believed that community is built upon individuals’ needs, social relationships with their accompanying emotional aspects, networking or the exchange of material resources, psychological issues, and social issues. She also argued that since community is dynamic, historically determined and complex, there is a need to return diversity to community theory and practice, as it relates to both the community itself and its processes.

Following on from the ideas presented by Wiesenfeld (1996), Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld (1999) in their study of an urban barrio in Caracas, identified two sets of characteristics of community definitions: a) *structural characteristics* which comprised the people and the physical environment in which they live; and b) *functional characteristics* that are the existential processes of the community (i.e., everything that happens as a result of the interaction between the individuals and their environment).

They contended that a community is made up of associated individuals linked together with characteristics that are both unique and diverse. This first structural element, they argued, implies a confluence of values, norms, cultures and particular histories that must be understood from an integration of perspective. The second structural element referred to the physical environment in which people live and the space outside. Garcia et al., maintained that the way space is handled within a community is of great importance since it can act as an indicator of how people perceive and feel about their environment (community). They asserted that the structural elements of a community can be considered as being part of a dynamic system where community life integrates the physical aspects of community and simultaneously sets the stage for the development of the functional elements of community. Functional elements involve the social networks that are generated in everyday community life among community members. Accordingly, Garcia et al. provided the most recent and comprehensive definition of community as “a dynamic whole with the structural and functional aspects permanently articulated with each other” (p. 730). Furthermore, they indicated that a community is, among other things, a long and continuous process that develops over time.

Summary

Although there have been many attempts to define the term community (Hillary, 1955; Heller, 1989; Wiesenfeld, 1996), no definitive definition has been proposed. From the literature reviewed, four broad perspectives on community have emerged. First, community as geography or territory, which has a finite and bounded physical location. Second, community as a local social system, with interrelated social institutions and relationships. Third, community as a particular kind of human association or relationship irrespective of location, for example, relationships of

tradition or religion. Fourth, community as ideology, which is as an expression of what it should be rather than what it is – ‘the good life’.

While the definition presented by Garcia et al. (1999) is the most comprehensive and workable to date (Chavis & Pretty, 1999), the term community remains an abstract concept containing several dimensions (Bulmer, 1985; Day & Murdoch, 1993). The need to study, explore and understand these dimensions have led to the development of models and measures of how people feel about living within a community. These models and measures are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Dimensions of Community

'Community' is a multifaceted term, which means focussing on attachment to localities, relationship structures and determinants of collective action (McKcown, Rubinstein, & Kelly, 1987). People belong to multiple communities defined by places to which they belong, as well as by their shared activities with others (Gusfield, 1975; Heller, 1989; Hunter & Riger, 1986; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Community-centred research covers a broad range of topics and, in an effort to achieve greater understanding of community, several studies have examined the various dimensions that researchers believe underlie the term community.

The identification and examination of the processes and dimensions that are specific to community, and are not found in other social structures, provide much of the rationale for regarding 'community' as a distinct area of investigation. Two concepts closely related to community are *sense of community* (SOC) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and *community identity* (Puddifoot, 1994, 1995, 1996). The components of these concepts and their relation to similar ones, including *community attachment* (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981) and *community satisfaction* (Bardo & Hughey, 1984; White, 1985), are considered to be fundamental to the comprehension of community phenomena (Garcia, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 1999). All these components involve the experiences and perceptions of people living within, and among, specific communities. The models of sense of community and community identity are relevant to the present study, because understanding of the term community is based on references to the individuals' own community. These models also detail how the various definitions of community within the literature have influenced the way researchers have sought to understand and

measure community. Furthermore, the development of these two models is presented as a background to the work related to the concept of community, and to illustrate the differences in approaches taken by different researchers to measuring community both in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Community psychology researchers in the United States of America investigated neighbourhood bonding in the 1970s and 1980s as an examination of the concept of sense of community (SOC) (Plas & Lewis, 1996). Sarason (1974) argued that most people yearn to be part of a larger network of relationships that would give expression to their needs for intimacy, diversity, usefulness, and belonging, but that they rarely feel needed in these ways. He termed this *sense of community* which is characterised by “the perception of similarities to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, (and) the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157).

Past studies have shown that SOC is more than a philosophical abstraction (Glynn, 1981). For example, Doolittle and MacDonald (1978), developed the 40-item Sense of Community Scale (SCS) to investigate communicative behaviours and attitudes at the community level. The purpose of this scale was to differentiate between low, medium and high SCS neighbourhoods on five factors: 1) informal interaction with neighbours, 2) safety – having a good place to live, 3) pro-urbanisation (privacy and anonymity), 4) neighbouring preferences – degree of interaction, and 5) localism – options and desire to participate in neighbourhood affairs. From the results of Doolittle and MacDonald’s study emerged three generalisations. Firstly, there was an inverse relationship between pro-urbanism and preference for neighbouring. Secondly, there was a direct

relationship between safety and preference for neighbouring. Thirdly, pro-urbanisation decreased as perceptions of safety increased.

In contrast, Glynn (1981) proposed and developed a measure of SOC that was based on the work of Hillery (1955). He utilised a number of structural frameworks from sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and fiction to conceptualise this process. Glynn researched three communities, and identified 202 behaviours/subconcepts related to SOC, from which 120 items were developed, representing actual and ideal characteristics of community. He found the strongest predictors of actual SOC were: 1) expected length of community residency, 2) satisfaction within the community, and 3) the number of neighbours one could identify by name. He also found a positive relationship between SOC and the ability to function competently in the community. However, Glynn's work was criticised on the grounds of his treatment of SOC as an individual level variable, rather than the community level variable that his scale was supposed to measure and represent (Puddifoot, 1995).

In response to the criticism of Glynn's (1981) model, Buckner (1988) developed a Neighbourhood Cohesion Index (NCI). Buckner attempted to combine both the individual's SOC with their perception of the overall social cohesion of the community. Employing a self-report procedure with an 18 item 5 point Likert scale, he examined what he termed sense of community/cohesion in 206 residents in 3 neighbourhoods in the United States. Buckner originally explored three dimensions: 1) the residents' sense of community, 2) residents' attraction to the community, and 3) residents' degree of interaction within the community, which were measured by separate items in the NCI. Despite this multi-pronged approach, the results of a factor analysis of the scale revealed one dimension of SOC at the community level, which he subsequently labelled *cohesion*. However, Buckner's measure still relied upon a simple aggregation of

individual scaled responses (Puddifoot, 1996), and did not fulfill his intention of providing a meaningful “measure of the cohesiveness of that is collective of neighbourhood residents” (p. 775).

Despite the problems confronting the research by Glynn (1981) and Buckner (1988), the models they presented are considered important because of their recognition of the discrepancies between real and ideal levels of SOC, and in demonstrating the relationship between SOC and an individual’s ability to function competently within the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although these studies attempted to build upon explicit theory, prior to 1986 there was little consensus by researchers on a general definition of SOC.

A comprehensive theory for SOC was created by McMillan and Chavis (1986) using their Sense of Community Index. Community for McMillan and Chavis referred, among other things, to one’s sense of place, its people, their relationships, their sharing and caring for one another and their sense of belonging. Using political science, sociology, community psychology and social psychology concepts and research, McMillan and Chavis conceptualised and identified four underlying, interrelated, dimensions of SOC. The first dimension was membership, which had four attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and personal investment. The second dimension, the capacity to influence the referent group, also has four attributes: attraction to the community in which one feels one has power, conformity to the community to which one feels belonging, the need for consensual validation within the community and reciprocal and concurrent influence between the individual and community. The third dimension of SOC is the collective meeting of need, that is, the implication that community is distinguished by its capacity to organise for the mutual needs of its members. The fourth dimension, a shared emotional connection, is an

affective component based upon opportunities to share, experience, and resolve events through the development of trusting bonds.

Based on these elements, people who have a high SOC toward a particular referent group can be described as also having a feeling of belongingness; they believe they can exert some control over the group and may also be influenced by the group; they assume that their needs are being met through the collective capabilities of the group; and because of a shared history, they feel a very strong emotional bonding and investment in the group (Davidson & Cotter, 1997). The importance of this model is that it demonstrated that an operational definition of the term 'community' can be formed, since there is agreement on what living in a community is like, that is, SOC. The model also treated SOC as a multidimensional construct which has been very influential in the consideration of the term 'community' as multidimensional as well.

Since its inception, McMillan and Chavis's (1986) model has been applied to many contexts and with various specialised populations (Plas & Lewis, 1996). Examples of these studies include adolescents (Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994), immigrants (Regis, 1988), the elderly (Minkler, 1985), the workplace (Klein & D'Aunno, 1986), crime and jurisprudence (Levine, 1986) and in relation to community resilience (Sonn & Fisher, 1996).

More recently in the United Kingdom, Hedges and Kelly (1992) explored the extent to which participants in their study could define an area to which they belonged, its size and key features, and the factors that contributed to community loyalty. Focus groups were conducted over 20 sessions in 10 localities across the United Kingdom, to account for different regions, different sizes of community, urban and rural areas, new and historic towns, and areas which had undergone varying degrees of reorganisation of local government. One of the main conclusions of Hedges and Kelly's study was that

SOC was intuitive rather than rationally defined and contained elements of emotional belonging to generalised geographic areas rather than localities or neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, at an individual level greater mobility was associated with a reduced sense of belonging, and features of the life-cycle, such as school aged children, were factors that “committed” people more strongly to the community. They found a predictable pattern related to the size of the community of residence, with people in smaller communities manifesting a greater sense of identity and higher identification.

However, this research suggests that SOC is, to a significant extent, setting specific. That is, often the results of these studies cannot be replicated or generalised since their premise was based on the definition of community as a clearly defined geographic locality. Furthermore, since SOC’s formulation, researchers have remained unclear about whether it should be a part of the definition of community, or whether it should be considered to be the product of a developmental process that is parallel to the community’s own development (Garcia et al., 1999).

In an effort to incorporate past models of the dimensions underlying community and to foster the comparative analyses of different communities, Puddifoot (1994, 1995, 1996) developed the notion of community identity. Puddifoot (1996) viewed ‘community’ as a positive, meaningful entity that provided order to everyday life. He assumed that ‘community’ involved living in, belonging to, and having some commitment to a specific area. While it is not easy to pin down its exact meaning, or to measure it readily in practice, Puddifoot believed that community identity may concern the perception and expression of ideas about a particular community by its residents at a specific time. From a review of the research literature Puddifoot (1994, 1995, 1996) identified 14 dimensions underling community identity, which were then divided into six broad elements. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Elements and Dimensions of Community Identity

Element	Dimension
E1: Locus	D1: Members' own perceptions of boundaries and key topographical/built features
	D2: Members' own perceptions of key social/cultural characteristics of their community
E2: Distinctiveness	D3 Members' own perceptions of the degree of physical distinctiveness of their community
	D4 Members' own perceptions of the degree of distinctiveness of key social/cultural characteristics of their community
	D5 Members' own perceptions of the special character of their community
E3: Identification	D6 Members' perceptions of their own affiliation/belonging/emotional connectedness to location
	D7 Members' perceptions of their own affiliation/belonging/emotional connectedness to social/cultural groups/forms
	D8 Members' perceptions of others' affiliation/belonging/emotional connectedness to location
	D9 Members' perceptions of others' affiliation/belonging/emotional connectedness to social/cultural groups or forms
E4: Orientation	D10 Members' own reasons for identifying (or not) with the community
	D11, Members' own orientations to their community
E5: Evaluation of community life	D12 Members' own evaluations of the quality of community life
	D13 Members' perceptions of others' evaluation of the quality of human life
E6: Evaluation of community functioning	D14 Members' own evaluations of community functioning

The two important elements of community identity related to the perceived distinctiveness of the community and the strength of identification with that community by its members (Puddifoot, 1996). Distinctiveness refers to the measurable extent to which community is perceived as separate and different from other communities in its territorial and/or social features. Identification represents a perceived sense of affiliation, belongingness, and emotional connectedness to a physically delineated area or to characteristic social forms or practices of its members, as represented by Dimensions 1 to 9 in Table 1.

Dimensions 8 and 9 attempted to conceptualise perceptions through assumptions about others' perceptions and orientations. Puddifoot (1996) argued that these contribute to contextualising one's own perceptions. Dimension 11 includes the individuals' degree of personal investment in their community, their attraction to the community, their perceived future in it, their sense of emotional safety, their personal involvement or their sense of alienation with regard to community. Dimensions 12 and 13 represent positive aspects of community functioning, such as community spirit, friendliness, sense of mutuality, cooperativeness, extent of social interaction, commitment to the community, and the extent of neighbouring. Dimension 14 concerns the evaluation of community functioning, which influences the perception of the role and representativeness of the community to its members. Important features of communities include community services, leisure services, health services, commercial services, economic and other opportunities, the quality of life, the quality of the environment, the quality of decision making, and the ability to influence decisions. Of specific relevance to the present study are the elements of identification, orientation and evaluation of community life, with specific reference to dimensions 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12.

This model of community identity incorporated many of the frameworks of previous research. For example, Puddifoot (1995, 1996) has incorporated Glynn's (1981) model of SOC, Buckner's (1988) NCI, and Bardo and Hughey's (1984) model of community satisfaction. Puddifoot (1995) noted that while all these models were treated as separate phenomena, a review of the literature revealed areas of communality. Furthermore, he argued that regardless of the different theoretical perspectives and methodologies, most theorists have come to similar conclusions about the nature of community and its underlying dimensions/concepts (Puddifoot, 1996). He suggested that the term

'community' is a multidimensional construct. However, one of the major problems with this model is that it is applicable only to specific geographic areas and localities.

Studies have shown that many people now attain their identities and experience feelings of belonging in communities that are not only located within specific geographic areas, but with relational communities as well (Heller, 1989; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Social support and feelings of belonging are increasingly being found, not in the local neighbourhood, but through participation in formal and informal groups that transcend geographic boundaries. Perhaps what brings people together is not only locality, but common interests around which social relationships develop (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Heller, 1989; Royal & Rossi, 1996). Therefore, the application and measurement of the dimensions of community need to be extended beyond the geographical units such as the block, neighbourhood, community or city to incorporate and examine the relational aspects that may be important to its members (Royal & Rossi, 1996). In order to achieve this, the notion of the term 'community' needs to be clarified and understood first.

Summary

Through the identification and measurement of the various dimensions underlying the psychological properties of community, researchers are able to evaluate participants' feelings about living in a specific area and socialising within a specific group. More specifically, the context of the present study was the Perth Metropolitan area, and since the dimensions of sense of community and community identity, arguably, represent a multifaceted concept of an individual (Newbrough & Lorion, 1996), the context in which these dimensions are examined is extremely important. Understanding of the dimensions allows for the theoretical expansion and understanding of processes occurring within communities. The study and application of these models

is continually evolving, and is being applied across cultures and disciplines (Chavis & Pretty, 1999). It is this growing search for greater understanding and application of the dimensions of community by researchers that reflects the importance of the term 'community' itself.

Chapter 3: Application of Community Models to the Australian Context

The relationship between community and the models surrounding its measurement has been studied at length in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. While they have been applied with modifications in Australia (e.g., Coakes & Bishop, 1996; Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Rapley & Hopgood, 1997; Sonn, Bishop & Drew, 1999; Sonn & Fisher, 1996, 1998), results have been mixed and varied. While these three countries have more communalities than differences, it has been argued, for example, that Australia has a different sociopolitical history and geographic infrastructure to both the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Archer, 1997). Furthermore, its geographic isolation, particularly in the case Perth, from other towns, cities and countries (Bishop, Sonn, Drew & Contos, 2000), may also be considered an influential factor in the way Australians may conceptualise the term community.

As compared to the United States, Australia's non-indigenous population has no history of rebellion against a foreign ruler, and it has been argued that this is indicative of the difference between American and Australian people's attitudes towards authority at all levels. This idea has placed the tradition of rebellion, on the basis of one's firm belief that something is right, in the forefront of the way Americans handle conflict and confrontation (Rappaport, 1977). Rappaport further indicated that American folklore allows for the construct of personal empowerment and/or efficacy in effecting change. Therefore, in the American context, individuals are told that they have the power to actually effect macro-level change. This does not occur on a general basis within Australia (Archer, 1997).

Another difference between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, is that the Australian nation is relatively young. This has implications when discussing the issues surrounding community, since there may be a higher attachment to geographic locality for residents in the United Kingdom and the United States. The reasons may include length of residence, which influences residents' perceptions of feeling that they belong in particular locations. Studies indicate that the longer an individual resides in a community, the more they interact with others residing in the same area, and this in turn influences their feelings and perceptions of how they feel about living in that area (Garicia, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 1999). In addition, the locality of residence is often the place of birth of residents, as well as a source of family ties (Puddifoot, 1994).

Other concepts that are related to this are the issues of immigration and the multicultural nature of Australian society. It is widely accepted that Australian society has become much more complex and varied over the past 50 years (Jupp, 1997). Since the beginning of the postwar immigration program in 1947, the population has increased 2.3 times. In 1991, 23% of Australians indicated that they were born overseas, compared with only 9% in 1947. Migrants from non-English speaking birthplaces account for approximately 14%; and those of Asian and Middle Eastern birth are now 20 times more numerous than in 1947 (Moss, 1993). Australia is no longer overwhelmingly 'British' in its origins, and at the official and political level Australia is significantly 'multicultural'. Therefore, the ideology and government policies of multiculturalism have created the space for cultural diversity, which plays an important role in peoples' perceptions of community.

The issue of urbanisation and distance is also a distinguishing feature between Australia and the United States and the United Kingdom. Australia may be of similar

size to the United States, but has only 7% of its total population (Hugo, 1996).

Physically Australia is approximately 30 times the size of the United Kingdom, but has only 32% of its total population (Hugo, 1996). Within Australia, Western Australia is the largest state, occupying 33% of the total landmass, but comprises only 10% of the total population (Hugo, 1996). Additionally, Australia is considered to be the most urbanised country in the world (per capita). In summary, the size and distances between major towns and cities may influence how Australians, and people living in the Perth metropolitan area particularly, view and understand the notion of community.

Summary

There is a theoretical relationship between sense of community, community identity and the concept of the term community. Meaning is generated from the events and problems that people in a community encounter and the way they interpret them. The Australian, particularly the Perth metropolitan, context of community is unique and comparatively different in geographic size, population density, and demographic profile. Accordingly, the underlying assumptions guiding the present research process is that the meaning and understanding of the term community will differ from those offered by research in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

All research is grounded, implicitly or explicitly, in philosophy, and an ontological and epistemological position is assumed within any selection of data gathering and analysis methods (Nagy & Viney, 1994). Different philosophies, theoretical frameworks, models of understanding and making sense of reality lead to different positions about what reality is, and therefore demand different ways of establishing what can be accepted as real; different ways of validating or justifying the data relevant to reality; and different strategies for collecting such data (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995).

There are two major types of research: quantitative methods and qualitative inquiry. Both approaches have their own traditions, aims, methods and rules of inference (Behrens & Smith, 1996). The quantitative paradigm stems from a positivistic framework, which is hypothetico-deductive in nature, while the qualitative paradigm is based within a naturalistic framework and is interpretive in nature (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). According to Dabbs (1982), a major difference between the two paradigms is that qualitative research examines the meanings of an event or phenomenon, whereas quantitative research assumes the meaning and examines the distribution of its occurrence. The present study has followed the qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry used across many disciplines and subject matters, and encompasses many theoretical paradigms, methods and approaches to research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative

research involves “an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2).

There are many approaches to qualitative data analysis, with the choice of the analytic approach being influenced by a number of factors including the particular research goals, questions being asked, the methods used for data collection, as well as the type of data available for collection and investigation (Behrens & Smith, 1996; Massey, Cameron, Ouellette, & Finc, 1998).

Merriam (1988; cited in Cresswell, 1994) has identified six basic characteristics or underlying assumptions of qualitative research. They are:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than outcomes or products.
2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences and structures of the world.
3. The primary instrument for data collection and analysis is the researcher.
4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork.
5. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding.
6. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details provided by others.

One significance of qualitative strategies is the extent to which findings, both theoretical and substantive, are grounded in the data (Behrens & Smith, 1996; Patton, 1990). Qualitative methods are also effective at building, redefining and elaborating upon theory that has already been created. Thus data are analysed in terms of already existing concepts and strategies in an attempt to clarify boundaries, substructures, patterns of interrelationship, and to identify additional concepts and categories (Kirk &

Miller, 1986; Kivnick & Jernstedt, 1996). This is a major objective of the current study, and is the rationale behind the use of qualitative methods.

As previously stated, the qualitative paradigm searches for meaning and understanding, and according to Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) it tends to assume a constructivist framework which indicates the ways in which knowledge is generated within networks of social activities and systems of socially constructed meanings. Within the objectives of the present study, the researcher's philosophical orientations, the social constructionist (constructivist) paradigm has been adopted (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985, Nagy & Viney, 1994), using a modified version of analytic induction (Glasner & Strauss, 1967). These concepts will be explained further in the following sections.

The Constructivist Paradigm

One of the goals of theorising in research may be the development of understanding of direct lived experience rather than construction of abstract generalisations. The aim of qualitative analysis is understanding through interpretation of phenomena within their specific contexts (Denzin, 1992). Epistemologically speaking, this paradigm confirms the role of the subjective experience and the need to understand it, with the basic purpose of contributing to the explanation of human behaviour (Wiesenfeld, 1997).

The constructivist paradigm is founded on the ontological position that there is no single, dominant reality, but that realities and meanings are culturally determined. These meanings cannot be disconnected from their context, and must be understood in terms of both the similarities and the differences between people. There is also an emphasis upon: description rather than explanation; a representation of reality through the eyes of participants; the importance of viewing the meaning of experience and

behaviour in context and in its full complexity; a view of scientific process as generating working hypotheses rather than immutable, objective empirical facts; and an attitude towards theorising which emphasises the emergence of concepts from the data rather than their imposition upon it (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). In essence, the primary concern is explaining the processes by which people come to describe, explain or account for the world in which they live, from their own perspective (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985).

The raw data of research conducted within a constructivist paradigm are primarily textual rather than numerical, and frequently gathered from unstructured or semi-structured interviews (Nagy & Viney, 1994) (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, the constructivist view of research acknowledges the ways in which research activity inevitably influences the object of inquiry; the researcher and participants are characterised as interdependent in the social process of research (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Nagy & Viney, 1994). That is, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is considered to be the source for the construction of meaning about the phenomenon under investigation. According to Kingry-Westergaard and Kelly (1990), people and systems become understandable when they are considered a part of a multilevel, multistructured and multidetermined social context.

In psychology, the emergence of constructivism can be dated from Gergen (1973). In his paper 'Social psychology as history', he argued that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge, is historically and culturally specific, and that there is a need to extend inquiry beyond the individual into social, political, and economic realms for a proper understanding of the evolution of present day psychology and social life. In addition he argued that there is no point looking for 'once-and-for-all' descriptions of

people or society, since the only abiding feature of social life is that it is constantly changing.

According to Burr (1995), there are four critical elements associated with the constructivist paradigm:

1. A critical stance that invites criticism and challenges the idea that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observations of the world.
2. The ways in which individuals understand the world, the categories and concepts that are used, are historically and culturally specific and relative.
3. It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that their versions of knowledge become fabricated, since an individual's current accepted ways of understanding the world is a product of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other.
4. Knowledge and social action go together, thus each different construction brings with it a different kind of action.

The way that researchers set about attaining knowledge, and the techniques used to collect evidence are directly related to their views of social reality. In addition, the way in which they think about social reality ought to be studied. Thus, according to social constructivism, if the belief is that social reality exists as a meaningful interaction between individuals, then it can only be known through the subjective understanding of others' interpretations and within a specific context. As previously stated, the present study has utilised this paradigm as a vehicle for understanding and exploring participants' conceptions of the term community. The principles of the constructivist paradigm provided the means to incorporate and consolidate the subjective biases of the participants and the limitations of the researcher into the research methodology. Furthermore, the paradigm enabled the researcher to view the data in context, through

the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews using a modified version of analytic induction.

Analytic Induction

All research is conducted within a context that is based on assumptions that determine which questions are legitimate and how answers to these questions may be obtained (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Accordingly, if psychological phenomena are located within socially constructed, multiple and ever changing realities, then the investigation of these phenomena requires a method that allows the construction of theory at the individual level while still incorporating the connections between individuals (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998).

One of the goals of qualitative research is to develop a theory that is 'grounded', that is, closely and directly relevant to the particular setting under study. It involves an integrative process in which the ideas from previous literature and research participants' stories and ideas are woven together by the researcher. The current study has utilised a modified analytic induction approach that is based, in part, on grounded-theory methodology (Glasner & Strauss, 1967).

Within the analytic induction model, the researcher begins with a tentative hypothesis explaining the phenomenon observed and then attempts to verify or expand upon the hypothesis. The advantages of analytic induction lie in its capacity to generate conceptual formulations, induce theoretical revisions by examining negative evidence, integrate theoretical and judgement sampling processes into the social sciences and create process theories (Retting, Chiu-Won Tam, & Maddock Magistad, 1996). The idea that inductive, rather than deductive reasoning is involved allows for the modification of concepts and relationships between concepts throughout the process of

research, with the goal of most accurately representing the reality of the situation (Ratcliff, 2000).

Analytic induction is unlike other qualitative approaches since it begins with a pre-existing theoretical view point or premise that guides the researcher's approach to the cases that are examined (Gilgun, 1995; Miller, 1982). It is a reflective model which Glasner and Strauss (1967) have summarised into five steps:

1. Develop a general statement about the topic.
2. Collect data to gain a better understanding of the topic.
3. Modify, revise and expand the statement as data are collected.
4. Search for cases which provide the opportunity to revise the level of understanding reached by the researcher.
5. Develop a satisfactory explanation.

While traditionally it is considered a method of causal analysis or as a method of proof (Miller, 1982; Robinson, 1951), the present study does not focus on cause, but rather the definitional issues and limitations of existing theoretical definitions of the term 'community'. Furthermore, it is realised that the researcher will not develop definitions and generalisations that are universal, but rather, will develop working hypotheses and concepts that illuminate other similar situations (Gilgun, 1995).

Because of these departures from classic analytic induction, the procedures fall under the category of modified analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Gilgun, 1995).

The process of modified analytic induction used in the present study is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Summary

The theoretical context of the current study can be described by a number of characteristics. These include a commitment to constructivist epistemology and an

emphasis on description rather than explanation. Of particular interest is the representation of reality through the eyes of the participants, and the importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context. Using a modified analytic induction methodology, the process of research is viewed as generating working hypotheses rather than stable facts, and there is an emphasis on the emergence of concepts from the data through the use of qualitative methodologies.

The aim of the current study is to provide an explorative and descriptive account of the underlying conceptions of the term 'community', and the expectation is that participants will have a different way of conceptualising the term 'community' as compared with previous studies conducted in the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Chapter 5: Method

Research Design

As previously discussed, this research used qualitative methodology which allows understanding of phenomena in a contextual, holistic way, emphasising understanding of the meanings that people assigned to the phenomena under investigation (Wiesenfeld, 1997). The qualitative methodology employed in this study allowed the researcher to examine the unstructured thoughts and ideas of participants, in order to determine the different ways in which the participants assigned meaning to the term 'community'.

An interview-based research design was used, in order to assess the complexities and processes that emphasised the participants' frame of reference (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1984) asserted that qualitative data are "a source of well-grounded, rich description and explanation of processes occurring in local contexts" (p 225). Accordingly, the process was both investigative and exploratory, allowing flexibility that is needed to accommodate the changing nature of behaviour (Cook & Reichardt, 1979).

Participants

The snowball sampling processes of the present study were more theoretical (Glasner & Strauss, 1967) and purposive rather than representative (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990). Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to build broader theoretical insights into the ongoing process of data collection and analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Sampling was thus directed by the evolving theory which allowed comparisons according to various subdivisions or categories between and among the

population sample (Strauss, 1989). This type of sampling is very rewarding as it develops the theory quickly and efficiently (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to study the range of concepts rather than determine their distribution or frequency (Troost, 1986).

The criteria for participant selection were: (a) to have a number of adults, (b) of both genders, (c) at different ages and (d) different stages in their life, having (e) different cultural/ethnic backgrounds, and (f) living in different areas around the Perth metropolitan area. The sample comprised 16 participants, 8 males and 8 females, whose ages ranged from 18 to 68 ($M = 38.31$, $SD = 15.59$). Nine participants were married or defacto, and 6 had children. Further demographic information is provided in Table 2. The number of interview participants was determined when the information reached saturation point, following the criterion proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1995), that is, when themes became repetitive and no new information was provided.

Table 2

Demographic Data for all Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of birth	Culture/ Ethnicity (as described by participant)	Married / Defacto	Children	Profession
1	male	56	Australia (Perth)	Australian	yes	3	mechanic
2	female	19	Australia (Kalgoorlie)	Aboriginal	no	0	personal assistant
3	male	23	Australia (Perth)	Australian	yes	0	student
4	male	24	Australia (Perth)	Gay	no	0	student
5	female	51	Australia (Perth)	Australian	yes	5	medical typist
6	female	38	Greece	Greek	yes	0	hairdresser
7	male	27	South Africa	Jewish	no	0	doctor
8	male	42	South Africa	Greek	yes	2	stock broker
9	female	31	Australia (Perth)	Australian	yes	2	kitchen assistant
10	female	56	Croatia	Croatian	yes	0	beautician
11	male	26	Malaysia	Malaysian	no	0	accountant
12	male	52	Australia (Melbourne)	Australian	no	0	auto electrician
13	female	52	Zimbabwe	Australian	no	0	personal assistant
14	male	68	Australia (Merridin)	Australian	yes	3	politician
15	female	30	South Africa	Jewish	yes	2	psychologist
16	female	18	Australia	Australian	no	0	performer

Materials

A dictaphone was used to record interviews. The researcher referred to the interview schedule (see Appendix A), as well as a journal, which was used to record notes during and after the interview. An information sheet explaining the nature of the study was provided for participants (see Appendix B). All participants completed a consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix C).

Data collection and analysis

The decision to use in-depth interviewing as the research strategy for the current study is linked to the theoretical foundation upon which the study is based (as discussed in Chapter 4). A primary focus of in-depth interviews is to understand the significance of human experiences as described from the participants' perspective and interpreted by the researcher (Minichiello et al., 1995). Studies using in-depth interviewing attempt to discover people's experiences by presenting analysis based on empirically and theoretically grounded descriptions. This develops an understanding of the interpretations people attach to their situations.

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed which focused on the issues that were identified in the literature as being central to the research topic (see Appendix A).

Rigour

Following Glasner and Strauss' (1967) model, and in accordance with their guidelines, a modified method of analytic induction was used. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, and throughout the data analysis process the data was organised categorically, and was repeatedly reorganised and recoded according to conceptual themes recognised by the researcher. These codes were derived from the participants' interviews, the research question and theoretical frameworks. A list of the major ideas, concepts and themes that were generated were chronicled for each interview and then compared with the concepts and themes resulting from other interviews, ultimately providing a conceptual model for the emergent theory of understanding the underlying concepts of how participants made sense of the term 'community'.

Internal validity was ensured by using the strategy of 'member checking' (Cresswell, 1994), where a peer and two participants served as a check once the analysis process was completed. This audit of the researcher's interpretations of the participant's meanings ensured the true nature of the data. External validity was ensured by the provision of detailed descriptions so that anyone interested in transferability would have a solid framework for comparison (Cresswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988).

To ensure reliability in this study, two techniques outlined by Cresswell (1994) were utilised: 1) a detailed account was kept of the focus of the study, the researcher's role, and the context from which the data would be gathered; and 2) data collection and analysis strategies were reported in detail in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of methods used in this study.

To further strengthen the integrity of the study, all phases of the project were subject to scrutiny by an independent researcher who was experienced in qualitative research methods. A summary of this process is illustrated in Figure 1.

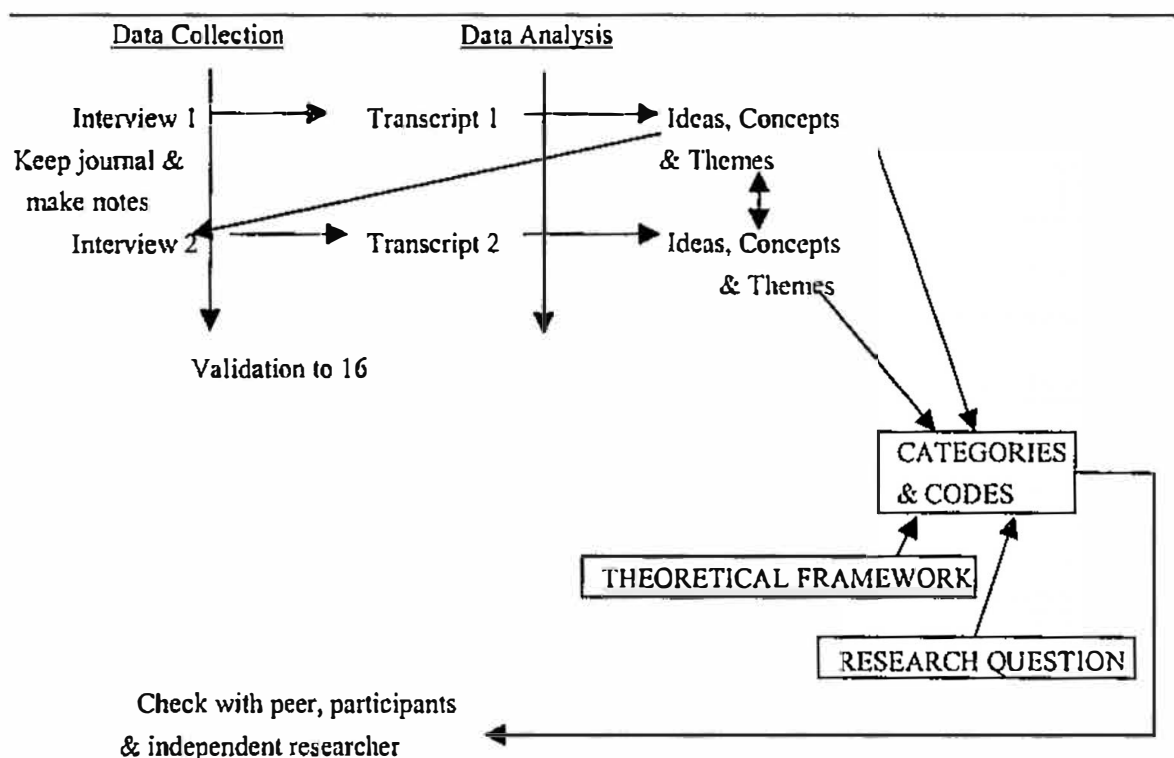


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of method used to analysis interviews

Procedure

In order to build a sample of participants, the researcher used a snowballing method of sampling which allowed for divergence of the sample (Patton, 1990). This involved approaching a group of participants with whom the researcher had made initial contact and asked them to recommend other participants who might be able to assist with the research. Through this technique more people were subsequently identified and interviewed. The researcher initially approached or contacted residents living around the Perth metropolitan area. This method allowed the researcher to build and broaden the theoretical insights in the ongoing process of data collection and analysis as it allowed for maximum variation of participants.

Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of their participation, the nature of the inquiry and the intended use of the information. All participants were assured that their input would be confidential and were instructed that they could withdraw at any stage. Once the individual agreed to participate in the study, a suitable time was arranged for the researcher to conduct the interview. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes when convenient to the participant.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided the participants with the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix B and C). Each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes. A total of 18 interviews were conducted but, due to equipment malfunction, two interviews were not analysed further. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were thanked, and asked if the researcher could return to confer and confirm the researcher's interpretations of the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

The Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University approved this research with the stipulation that the following ethical procedures were implemented:

1. Participants were guaranteed that confidentiality would be maintained at all times. Therefore, the consent forms requiring no direct identification (see Appendix C), and the relationship between the participants' names and their transcripts and audio-tapes were known only to the researcher and supervisor.
2. A transcriber had access to the original interview tapes, but was fully debriefed about the issue of confidentiality. Furthermore, any identifying features or codes that may have linked participants to their interview were not divulged to the transcriber.
3. Prior to each interview, the general aims of the study were explained both verbally and via an information sheet (see Appendix B) before agreement and consent were obtained. Participants were informed about the purpose of their participation, the nature of the inquiry, and the intended use of the information.
4. Participants were informed that they could refuse to participate without penalty. They could also withdraw from the study at any stage and could decline to answer any question.
5. All participants were treated in accordance with both the Australian Psychological Society (APS, 1997) and Edith Cowan University (2000) Ethical Guidelines.

Chapter 6: Results

The main aim of the present study was to explore and gain an insight into the concepts underlying peoples' understanding of the term 'community'. The concepts that emerged from the data are multidimensional, and reflect similarities and differences to previous findings in related areas, supporting the rationale that West Australians may conceptualise the term 'community' differently.

This section details the information obtained from the participants. It illustrates and describes how the information may be ordered into broad categories and specific dimensions to represent the concepts underlying the participants' understanding of the term 'community'. The discussion also highlights how these concepts are related. A summary of the broad concepts and specific dimensions arising from the interviews is presented in Figure 2.

CONCEPT	DIMENSIONS
Geographical Attachment to Place	
Communality	: shared responsibility : shared interests : shared goals : shared ideas : shared past
Social Interaction	: social networks : support : helping behaviour
Active Involvement and Participation	: having a voice : having influence : making a contribution
Family	
Sense of Belonging	: safety and security : comfort
Transience	

Figure 2. Broad concepts and specific dimensions representing concepts of 'community'

Geographical Attachment to Place

Geographic attachment to place referred to the ties that participants felt toward their geographic place of residence. The idea that participants felt that the notion of community was in some way geographically based is an important result, since according to the data, geographic community, whether it be neighbourhood, suburb, town or city is still a major concept underlying the participants' understanding of community. Comments included:

"For me community involves where you live, your neighbours"

"I see it [community] as a group who basically live in a suburb"

"Community is a group of people that live together".

Upon further analysis, the data revealed that, while all participants were able to identify an aspect of community as geographical, not all personally identified as belonging to a geographical community, as is highlighted by the following:

"With me working at the Fremantle Hospital, you've got people that you work with and that's another part of your life which is still part of community, it's just a working community".

The data also suggested that the geographical layout of an area, and its associated environment, play an integral part in everyday life. Furthermore, the length of time participants had lived in a place also determined the extent of their geographical attachment. This is illustrated by comments from two participants:

"We've only lived here for four months and we don't really have a lot to do with it [the community]"

"We've lived here in Mount Pleasant for a long while now, but before that we were living in a house down the road. We found that we like the area so much that when we decided to move, we decided to pick the same community".

One participant noted that the *"common history of the place"* strengthened their feelings of *"identity"* and *"belonging"* within their identified community, linking this concept to the others that emerged from the data.

Communality

Communality is the subjective feeling that people belong together. Data collected suggested that the concept of communality includes the attributes of shared responsibility, shared interests, shared goals, and shared ideas. It is these *"common things"* that are thought of, by participants' as providing a *"bond"* and *"connection"* between people. Comments included:

"Community is a group of people who are bonded together through sharing a similar set of values and beliefs and identity ...identify themselves as being part of a larger group"

"I see community as being a group of people who share an identity, who share at some level the same morals and ideas"

"When you're involved in the community like the Jewish one there's an element of responsibility that you feel for people in the community who, for example, are less able to look after themselves"

"Community is a group of people that you feel comfortable with and are able to communicate with and have enough in common with"

"From being born in South Africa, moving to Perth thirteen years ago, being Jewish and now living in Fremantle, I guess I identify community as being more of a shared identity ...an identity shared by shared beliefs and values".

Participants noted that when people live or work in close proximity to one another, or are involved in groups or organisations that meet regularly, they can communicate more frequently about how they view their world and how they cope with it. This was apparent, particularly with reference to the fact that members of the community interacted to accomplish shared goals and to manage shared problems and uncertainties. Shared problems and uncertainties, in turn, can stimulate shared reactions and solutions. This point is illustrated by the following observation:

"The more experiences people share the more they can identify with other people ...the more that other people can identify with each other".

Clearly the concept of communality is central to most peoples' understanding and experiences of community. The data also suggests that the concept of social interaction is very closely related to the feelings of "togetherness".

Social Interaction

Social interaction refers to the degree to which some people engage in social interactions with one another. It is an individual level concept, and factors such as social networks, the availability of support and help, appeared to be very significant when discussing this concept of community. Social networks refer to a person's overall connections to others with regard to the supportive content of its ties, while social support refers to the various resources that can be provided by supportive interpersonal relationships. Participants noted that this support could be social, emotional or physical. The importance of these factors was stressed by all participants, and is evident from the following remarks:

"You can have a community, but if there's no caring within the community its not really a community as such"

"Community is a group of people that can help you if you ask for it ...it is a group of people that can support and help you like the Huntington's Disease Support Association".

Furthermore, participants noted that this support was through informal networks, offering them a sense of *"togetherness"*. Participants' reflections included:

"People watch out for one another and that's really important"

"The good thing about this community is that you get support from one another, being a community and a diverse group of people and especially with your neighbours, you support each other in many ways"

"...you meet people on the street and they have this friendliness. I mean no matter where you're from or what race they are, they're just out there to help you".

"...people seem to make time here in Kalamunda. They just stop and talk to you in the street, stop their car when they're passing you for a bit of a chat before they go on doing their own business and that takes an effort, so an effort is being made by everyone ...you're acknowledged as being a part of things which is great".

Data suggested that social interaction has a "buffering" effect, and that the "helping" behaviour of people within the various communities may be identified as resources for helping others to cope with stressors, to promote psychological adjustment and wellbeing, and to improve the overall "quality of life". From the data it is apparent that the more people interact, the more they tend to develop similar feelings and understandings. As previously stated, these are related to the concepts of communality and sense of belonging since it fostered feelings of being connected.

Active Involvement and Participation

Involvement and participation refer to the process by which individuals take part in the decision-making processes of groups or institutions that affect them (Unger & Wandersman, 1995). It is a community level concept, and issues relevant to involvement and participation were particularly emphasised by most participants, even those who did not feel that they were involved, or that they participated in the community. The type and extent of involvement and participation differed among participants, ranging from political participation in community organisations to voluntary action in voluntary associations. Many participants commented that their overall participation within their community depended upon their own and the community's "needs". This point is reflected by the following remark:

"I'm comfortable with not doing much in the community, but if I saw a need and I could help in that need then I would do it, but it would depend on the need".

Data collected suggest that the attributes of having a voice, and having an influence over the community are related, and are considered by participants to be important.

This influence appears to be bi-directional, and is illustrated by the following comments:

"Carramar is a really new community and everyone seems to have the feeling where they're involved with what's going on within the community ...if something happens in the area, well they seem to band together and get everyone's point of view and what to do about the problem, and that's great because someone else wants your opinion on what to do"

"...I think also community is being involved in things that matter. You know if there's any sort of discrepancy, ...anything you don't sort of believe in or you take a strong view you can have your say ...at meetings ...and because things do get changed it means something ...that's what brings a community together I think".

Making a contribution was considered to be the impetus behind why many participants were involved and participated within their respective communities. The following observations are indicative:

"Because I feel that I'm active in the community I feel like I'm making some sort of contribution ...and it makes me feel good"

"I believe that by being so involved [in the community] I do make a contribution, and hopefully my children will contribute as well, because in contributing I believe that it's part of the formation of roots – where you belong – and I believe it's very important to have roots".

Being involved and participating in one's community, much like the individual level concept of social interaction, are also related to the concepts of communality and sense of belonging.

Family

Family is a subject that was repeatedly discussed as a constituent of the term community. For all participants, family referred to those people of immediate blood relation, or step families that lived in the same house. The subject of family was considered significant by all participants, particularly with reference to community, since every person interviewed considered family to be part of their 'definition' of community. Comments included:

"Community is people involved with people, but involved with their families first and the priority is their families"

"...community to me is a lot to do with family, centers on family"

"Coming from an Aboriginal family and growing up with all of my family in Kalgoorlie, community to me would probably be people around me that mean a lot to me ... friends and family"

"When I think about community I think about family basically, family as a group of people who share a certain commitment together".

Data collected indicated that children were identified as influencing the type of social interaction, and community involvement and participation. Children appeared to influence the type of community organisations that people were involved in, as well as the frequency of their involvement. One participant commented:

"When we had kids we did a lot more because you're a lot more involved in the community when you've got youngsters going to school with playgroups, dancing lessons ... once they leave, you don't have the involvement with the community like you used to have".

The data suggests that any discussion of community needs to include the concept of family.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging alludes to feelings of group acceptance and devotion (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). From the analysis of the interview transcripts, it appears that the specific communities to which participants felt that they belonged, was influenced by the way they felt. Overwhelmingly these feelings were of a positive nature, mostly related to feelings of acceptance and a sense of relatedness. This point is highlighted by one participant who suggested that:

"a person who belongs to a certain community would have a greater sense of well-being and happiness and I just think that most people need that sort of ...sense of belonging".

Other comments included: *"The first thing I think of when I think of community is belonging, I suppose ...and being accepted"*, and

"I feel accepted. I feel loved. I feel like I matter ...I feel like I'm not alone".

Data suggested that these feelings were created and maintained by a safe environment, and familiarity with the community to which participants felt they belonged. The issues of safety, security, and comfort were raised by all participants. This is suggested by the remarks:

"Belonging to a community gives me a sense of comfort, belonging and identity"

"The ability to identify with a certain group of people is very important and it gives a lot of people security"

"Community provides a safe place for you. You're familiar with things, the surroundings, and if you go to another community that you don't know much about, you don't feel at ease until you get to know it"

"If you get into a good community like here in Kingsley you feel safe. You feel safe.

You can walk down the road and talk to people. At the shops up there everyone knows

you. If you're passing people say "hello", and you feel good in that community because people acknowledge you"

A sense of belonging and a sense of security, safety and comfort are shown to be important positive phenomena for all those living and interacting within a community.

It is also apparent from the data that this concept is closely related to the degree of social interaction within a community, as well as being involved and participating at the community level.

Transience

The notion of community as transient emerged from the interviews. Transience refers to the ever-changing nature of community, that is, community is seen as dynamic and constantly changing according to the needs of its members. Participants remarked that *"community is something that is dynamic ... its changing all the time"*, and *"I think of the Perth community as being a multi-ethnic melting pot of various races and backgrounds and religions"*.

Furthermore, it is apparent from the data that membership within specific communities is also seen as dynamic. In addition to the demands and actions required for community involvement and participation, individuals must simultaneously deal with the many distinct identities that are interdependent by nature. For example, fulfilling the role of family member, student and employee. According to participants, it is this self-identity that allows them to feel a part of more than one community. This issue is illustrated by the following:

"I think my conception of community as it stands is me. I think that there's a lot of other communities that I would feel that I'm part of, like I feel I'm a part of the university community. I feel like I'm part of the north of the river community, I feel like

I'm part of a middle class Australian community. I feel like at times I'm part of the gay community as well as a male community".

This observation was reinforced by other comments such as:

"I would say that I operate at different levels of community and I think that I identify with individual levels of community and also a more global community"

"I suppose that in many respects I'm rather chameleon like in that I mix within a broad spectrum of people embracing a multitude of communities and I feel very comfortable doing that".

Data collected suggested that this notion of the transience may explain why some people identify community as either geographic or relational, or both. For example, a participant explained:

"When I think of community I think about it in terms of religious communities, ethnic communities, communities of belief, ...and then you can look at communities based on location to where you are at a particular point in time, so I guess to me community is all of these things mingled together".

The data suggested that this particular concept is independent of the interrelationships between the other identified concepts. Regardless of how community is defined, or how one feels about belonging to a particular community, it is still seen as constantly changing according to the needs of the individual.

Summary

The above discussion illustrates the concepts that emerged from the interviews. Community was viewed as eliciting positive feelings, even when not identified as 'ideal'. The reasons provided by participants are because individuals need to belong, they need to be with other people, and they have a need to fit in. The results also indicated that the concepts underlying participants' understandings of the term

'community', besides transience, are interrelated. In effect, as people interact over time within a common context, they develop shared patterns of behaviour and beliefs that come together to form communities. Furthermore, the emerging concepts need to be understood within the context that the data was gathered. This is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The aim and objective of this study was to broaden the information base on 'community', and to explore the conceptions underlying individuals' understandings of the term 'community'. The following vignette is a compilation of participants' responses and observations about how they responded to the concept of community:

"Community involves where you live, your neighbours, your suburb. On the other hand it also includes a group of people who are bonded together through similar values, beliefs and identity, who do not necessarily live in the same area. People within a community support one another and offer help when it is needed, and they get involved and participate in things that matter within the community. Community also involves the family, since family is a group of people who share a certain commitment together. When a person belongs to a community they feel accepted and loved, and this sense of belonging provides a feeling of security and safety. This sense of belonging means that one can feel a connection to more than one group since community is something that is dynamic; its changing all the time depending upon the needs of the individuals within it."

This conceptualisation of community reflects similarities to those expressed in the literature, comprising ideas and notions expressed by Hillery (1955) and Wiesenfeld (1996), for example. One of the reasons for the similarities may be the fact that each previous definition explored in the literature contained one or more of the concepts of

the term community as identified in the present study. For example, Warren (1963) discusses the term community in relation to locality; Gusfield's (1975) definition of the term community involved the notion of community as a relational construct; and Bulmer's (1985) notion of community involved the relationships between friends, neighbours and family. While participants in the current study were able to distinguish between their 'ideal' community, and the reality of the community to which they felt they belonged, community was overwhelmingly viewed as an important, positive entity. Accordingly, community is a key word that is of considerable importance in society, and a concept that has figured predominantly in discussions of the very nature of society (Wild, 1981).

The relational aspect of community as discussed by participants as including aspects of similarity and communality among members, social interaction, participation, and family were consistent with contemporary theories and definitions of community (Heller, 1989; Wiesenfeld, 1996; Garicia, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 1999). However, the fact that all participants felt that community was also geographically based, is an important result. While one may consider that the neighbourhood is not more than a minor element in the grander concept of community (e.g., Wellman, 1979, cited in Unger & Wandersman, 1985), it still remains an integral part. There is a need to view the link between geographic location and community from alternative points of view in greater detail, and the emergence of this concept from the data has several implications. Firstly, this result highlights the point made by Warren (1963), and Matindale (1964), that social life has to take place somewhere, and any discussion of community needs to have some territorial reference, in order for it to be distinguishable and measurable. Secondly, it indicates the presence of Puddifoot's (1994, 1995, 1996) first and second elements of community identity, namely Locus and Distinctiveness. However, the

results of this study do not distinguish between the various dimensions identified by Puddifoot, possibly because the term community has been conceptualised differently. Thirdly, it implies that the notion of community does not have to be distinguished as either relational or geographic as previously argued (Gusfield, 1975; Heller, 1989). The results of the present study indicate that the discussion of the term community may be both geographical and relational, since all participants noted that they belonged to more than one community.

Regardless of which community, or how many communities participants felt that they belonged to, certain elements appear to be essential in a community. These include: a core of commonness or the concept of communality, as identified by participants, that includes a collective perspective, agreed upon definitions, and some agreement about values. Participants noted that it was the shared interests, goals, ideas and past history that bound people together. Communities are unique social collectives because they provide a context for personal integration (Wild, 1981), and the emergence of this concept supports Puddifoot's (1994, 1995, 1996) fourth element of community identity, namely Orientation. The concept of communality provides an explanation for participants' identifying (or not) with the community (dimension 10), as well as influencing participants' orientation toward their community (dimension 11).

Furthermore, the results of the present study support components of Wiesenfeld's (1996) discussion on community, that is, members of a community are committed to the extent of identifying directly or indirectly with the whole, and by having shared rather than just having functional bonds with others.

The concept of social interaction is indicative of these bonds at an individual level. In relation to results from previous studies (Chavis & McMillan, 1986; Heller, 1989; Royal & Rossi, 1996) and definitions of community (Gusfield, 1975; Hillary, 1955;

Warren, 1963; Wiesenfeld; 1996) social support and help are increasingly being found, not just in the local neighbourhood, but through social interaction within social networks as well. From the results it appears that what brings people together is not just locality, but something common around which social relationships develop. The provision of social support through bonds within the community is a key area of interest for mental health professionals (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981), and the importance of social interaction lies in the fact that social networks provide a mediating structure for society (Heller, 1989). That is, they serve to connect individuals to the larger whole by supplementing interaction with the community, thus, encouraging the fourth concept of active involvement and participation. Previous researchers have indicated that both these concepts are central to any discussion on community and should be included in any definition of the term (Buckner, 1988; Glynn, 1981; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974).

Active involvement and participation emerged from the data, and was interpreted by the researcher to represent a community level concept that incorporated the ideas of having a voice, having influence within the community, and the feeling of making a contribution to the community. This concept and related ideas are consistent with some of the definitions and theories of community presented in the literature (e.g. Gusfield, 1975; Hillary, 1955; Warren, 1963; Wiesenfeld; 1996). In addition it equates to Heller's (1989) third attribute of community – as a collective power, and Buckner's (1988) theory of neighbourhood cohesion, specifically residents' sense of community and attraction to community, and the degree of their social interaction.

The concepts of active involvement and participation also form a major part of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) second and third dimension underlying their definition of sense of community: namely, the capacity to influence the referent group, and the

collective meeting of need. According to McMillan and Chavis, these dimensions are of particular importance because they promote social changes, influence self-identity, and impact upon self-efficacy. This concept is also related to Puddifoot's (1994, 1995, 1996) fifth element of community identity, namely Evaluation of Community Life, since it appears that participants used the degree of their social interaction, active involvement, and participation in community affairs as their benchmark for the quality of community life.

The emergence of 'family' as a central conception underlying the discussion of community indicates the importance of its inclusion in any future discussion or research into the area. Not only does family promote integration into the community, but it also forms the basis of social support and social networks that exist within any community. The significance of this result suggests that friends, neighbours and family be included as concepts in any analysis of community (Bulmer, 1985), since these relationships and associations are often located outside the 'neighbourhood' yet are still considered part of community.

Further analysis of the interviews showed a clear presence of some of the elements that make up the definition proposed by Minar and Greer (1968), as well as elements of the sense of community as proposed by Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) and the sense of belonging proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986). The term 'community' as referred to by McMillan and Chavis involves one's sense of place, its people, their relationships, their shared caring for one another and their sense of belonging. This concept also highlights Puddifoot's (1994, 1995, 1996) third element of community identity, namely Identification, with specific reference to dimensions 6 and 7. These dimensions involve participants' perceptions of their own affiliation/belonging/emotional connectedness to location, and to social/cultural groups/forms. The results indicate that

multiple elements are attached to this idea of a sense of belonging, which include safety, security and comfort. Accordingly community is partly based on the subjective feelings that individuals within the community have of belonging together. This concept of sense of belonging is evident in all definitions and models of community within the literature, although its exact nature and relationship to the term 'community' remains unresolved.

Participants noted that individual differences allow communities to be dynamic and transient in order to facilitate and cope with change. Consequently, the conceptions and theories of community that were presented by Maine (1861), Durkheim (1964) and Tonnies (1957) are not an accurate portrayal of modern society. These theorists discussed the notion of community as something stable that is eroding, as society becomes more modern. The results of this study indicate that contemporary communities and the people within them are capable of changing and adapting, in order to facilitate their needs. Community has not necessarily been eroded, it has simply changed over time.

In Perth, Western Australia, heterogeneity and individual differences appear to be valued, and diversity is encouraged (Bishop, Sonn, Drew & Contos, 2000). As previously mentioned, Western Australia, and Perth specifically, appear to be unique due their geographical size and isolation, the demographic composition, and the socio-political history. These may be some of the reasons why participants felt ties to more than one community, and may be unique to this study, since the context in which it was conducted differs from other published theories and research originating in the United States (e.g., Buckner, 1988) and the United Kingdom (e.g., Puddifoot, 1994, 1995, 1996).

The qualitative methodology and theoretical framework employed in the present study was holistic and collaborative, enabling a detailed exploration of the emergent concepts from the in-depth interviews. Utilising social constructivism as the overarching paradigm allowed the dynamic interaction between the participants and their context to be illustrated, from the participants' point of view. Acknowledging the differences in individual values, ideas, perspectives and perceptions enabled the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the term 'community', along with the relationships existing within it. In addition, the social constructivist paradigm provided the means to incorporate and consolidate the subjective biases of the participants' and the limitations of the researcher into the research methodology by acknowledging the ways in which research activity influences the object of inquiry. That is, the researcher and participants are characterised as interdependent in the social process of research, and the relationship between the researcher and the participants is considered a source for the construction of meaning about the phenomena under investigation (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Nagy & Viney, 1994).

Accordingly, the data collected emphasised the richness and complexity of participants' life experiences, and using modified analytic induction these stories were disassembled in order to generate meaningful information about participants' understanding of the term 'community' by also incorporating past theory. The use of modified analytic induction that was grounded in the data enabled some of the gap between theory and life to be bridged, because it allowed for the modification of concepts and relationships between concepts throughout the research process. That is, modified analytic induction methodology facilitated the generation of conceptual formulations, the induction of revisions through examination of negative evidence, the integration of theoretical and judgement sampling procedures, and the creation of

process theories, all throughout the process of research (Retling, Chiu-Won Tam, & Maddock Magistad, 1996).

There is a common element among the definitions of community that is reflected in the literature and the results of the current study, regardless of the context and motives, interests and needs which lead people to come together. That is, the concept of similarity, which is considered to be an essential condition for group identity to develop (Wiesenfeld, 1996). However, as mentioned, there are also individual differences that exist among members of communities. Communities are not purely homogenous, and perhaps it is the individual differences between people that leads them to identify with more than one community. The coexistence of these two seemingly contradictory notions is not necessarily problematic on a holistic level, and should be reflected in Australian community psychology approaches to community processes, as well as to the theoretical concepts of community.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. Firstly, the current research is only an exploratory study, using a relatively small sample size in order to discover and understand the relationships that are occurring. Furthermore, the concepts identified and the conclusions made in the current study were not drawn from a completely representative sample of people living in the Perth metropolitan area. Moreover, the current study only dealt with the individual level of analysis; thus the results cannot be generalised to a larger population. Although it is not possible to generalise findings from a small qualitative study, the findings of the current study offer a detailed description of concepts and processes, and offer future directions for theory and research.

Future Research

The findings of the current study raise a series of questions concerning the definitional nature of community which need to be clarified through future research. For example, the way in which participants identified themselves tended to influence the type of community to which they felt they belonged. Further, the extent of the involvement and participation of participants in their communities seemed to influence the extent to which they felt they belonged. The concept of sense of belonging appears to be related to whether community is seen as a positive or negative entity. These relationships need to be explored further.

Future research should also use a larger sample size, expanding the study to incorporate a greater diversity of people and places, and other results may be compared to rural towns in Western Australia, for example. The study could also be undertaken throughout Australia to establish an 'Australian' conceptualisation of the term 'community'. Furthermore, future research could advance this study from the individual level to the community level in order to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of the social, cognitive and affective components of community. This may enable a more holistic model of the 'Australian community' to be developed.

Implications

There are several theoretical implications of the current study. First, sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), and community identity (Puddifoot, 1994, 1995, 1996) are complex phenomena linked to the term 'community'. However, it is not clear whether sense of community and community identity should both be part of the definition of community, or whether they should be considered to be the product of a developmental process that is parallel to the community's own development. Future research may provide an insight into the area.

Second, the theoretical approach of the current study illustrates how qualitative methodology may be used when research begins with existing theory, and the intent is to test the theory for its practical usefulness in everyday life. The effort to comprehend the meanings of the term community from the perspective of the participants and from the theoretical understanding of the researcher was important for maintaining interpretative validity.

Third, the identification of a uniquely metropolitan Perth conceptualisation of community would further advance the area of community psychology, as well as provide the basis for an Australian theory of community.

This study involves the psychological understanding of the term 'community'. Through the identification and understanding of concepts identified in the current study, it is believed that they may help to facilitate the intentional creation of community when and where it is needed. Furthermore, primary prevention and intervention strategies based on the concepts identified may be designed to facilitate well being and mental health within communities, empowering people within them. For example, intervention strategies to facilitate better coping behaviour of single parents could focus on strengthening social support networks, and this may be achieved by focusing on the concepts of family and social interactions that occur within communities.

Conclusion

Communities have always existed, and will continue to do so, because humans are social creatures, living interdependently with others. Modern communities, however, are not as visible and clearly defined as in the past. Factors such as geographic isolation, ethnic differences, common dedication to tradition, continuous association, and distinctive lifestyles are no longer the dominating characteristics of modern association. It can be seen from the literature and the results of the present study that

the concept of community is a multifaceted term (Heller, 1989). People belong to multiple communities bound by the places in which they live and work, the institutions and organisations to which they belong, and by their shared activities with others. For example, the village is a community, so is the city, the neighbourhood, membership in a religious, racial or political group, or membership in a professional organisation.

The qualitative findings of the present study contribute significantly to the area of 'community' studies, and while it has been noted that it may not be possible to accommodate all reasonable standpoints on the nature of community (Puddifoot, 1996), the first step in refocusing on community may involve taking into account the concepts identified in the current study. The definitional status of the term community may remain unresolved, but the results of the present study indicate that 'community' is a universal concept that is still evolving. It can be concluded from the current study that there are many concepts and issues influencing people's understandings of the term 'community', and it is hoped that future research will aid in qualifying the concepts identified in this study in order to facilitate a greater understanding of 'community' in the Australian context.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

The Interview Schedule can be divided into four parts:

1. *Beginning the interview –*

- a) Tell me about yourself (demographic details)
- b) Tell me in your own words what you think of when I say the word 'community'. I have no particular set of questions to ask you. I want you to tell me what the term 'community' means to you, and why it is important to you. There is no right or wrong answer. Just tell me in a way that is most comfortable for you

2. *Facilitating recall -*

To help think of your understanding of the meaning of 'community', other people have indicated that this may include: ties to a geographical area or relational ties to people or groups in other areas around Perth, Australia, or the world.

3. *Prompts and further questions -*

How long have you lived here?

Tell me about your community:

How would you describe your community?

How do you see yourself in the community?

What does your community mean to you?

Tell me about good things in your community

Tell me about bad things in your community

Why do you think that is?

4. *Clarify uncertainties with follow up questions.*

Appendix B

Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Dear Participant

My name is Andria Green and I am a Masters Student undertaking a piece of research for my thesis project, looking at what the term 'community' means to people.

This study is aimed at trying to understand the themes underlying people's conceptions of the term 'community'. In undertaking this project it is hoped that we will be able to better understand the notion of community.

I would like you to take part in this project by answering some questions related to your own experiences. What types of things do you think about when you think of 'community'? I would invite you to look at the interview sheet so that you see the types of questions I will be asking you. It is expected that the interview will take no longer than 60 minutes.

I would also like to record the interview so that it can be transcribed in order to search for themes that come from all the interviews I am doing. In taping the interview you will not be identified so that your confidentiality is assured. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology.

I would also like you to know that at any time you are free to withdraw from the study without any reason being given. If at any time you have any difficulties with the information I will be talking about, you will be able to make contact with me, or my supervisor Julie Ann Pooley, to discuss issues that may arise for you.

I wish to thank you, in advance for your time and participation.

Andria Green
Julie Ann Pooley
School of Psychology
Edith Cowan University

9400 5591

Please retain this page for your reference and, read and return the next page to me.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Consent Form

It is a requirement that I have informed consent from participants taking part in this study, however to ensure your anonymity, I would like you to respond to the following questions. If you have queries regarding this procedure or any part of the study, then please ask.

For the purposes of confidentiality, I would prefer that you did not write your name or any other comments that make you identifiable. Please read the following questions and respond by circling Y (yes) or N (no).

Please Circle

Did you read the information sheet?	Y	N
Were you given adequate opportunity to ask questions?	Y	N
If you asked questions, were they answered to your satisfaction?	Y	N
Are you satisfied that you understand the implications of the study?	Y	N
Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this project?	Y	N

Thank you again for your time.